

# Zionist Authenticity: The Debate over Gush Emunim

---

[A]bove and beyond the legitimate security concerns regarding the West Bank and Gaza, the debate in Israel has a much deeper dimension, going back to basic belief systems and ideological commitments. These considerations relate directly to the protagonists’ respective self-definition as Israelis and to their conflicting perceptions of the nature and aims of Zionism.<sup>1</sup>

The 1970s and ‘80s witnessed the foundation and the activities of Gush Emunim – a grass-roots movement dedicated to the building of Jewish settlement in the West Bank. Gush Emunim’s extra-parliamentary activities included illegal settlement attempts and resistance to evacuations, lobbying, mass demonstrations and association with and defense of the Jewish underground, responsible for terror attacks against Arabs and the planned destruction of the Dome of the Rock. The group has been termed “fundamentalist”, “extremist”, “radical” and “messianic”, especially with regard to its brand of Religious Zionism as taught by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, whereby settlement and Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel is a divine command and a messianic process. The movement has been the subject of intense and varied analysis both in the press and the academy: its operational strategy, support base, political connections, ideology and religious inspiration have been well researched over the last three decades.

One of the more surprising aspects of this phenomenon is that even for Israeli standards the controversy over Gush Emunim has been so heated and emotional. Eliezer Don-Yehiya, when surveying the literature on the subject in 1987, noted the contrasts between different assessments of the movement: from seeing it as having a “profound impact”<sup>2</sup> or wielding “tremendous power”<sup>3</sup> on the Israeli political scene to being of

---

<sup>1</sup> Avineri 1986, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Newman 1985, p.

<sup>3</sup> Sprinzak, in Newman 1985.

limited influence<sup>4</sup> or no longer significant.<sup>5</sup> Some have called the Gush “the new Zionism”<sup>6</sup> while others have claimed that it represents “the moral warping of Israel’s ethical foundations”<sup>7</sup> or that it erodes the very legitimacy of the Jewish state.<sup>8</sup>

While Gush Emunim’s policies were indeed controversial and in fact remain so, I believe that the depth of the controversy is not rooted merely in the policy of establishing settlements but in the Gush’s self-image and strategy of presenting itself as the authentic heir of the Zionist movement. It is this claim to authenticity by connecting the Gush to Zionism as the central pillar of the Israeli civil religion that is at stake for both those who make such claims and those to reject them. The debate over Gush Emunim was and is a debate over Zionist authenticity that engages Israelis from across the political spectrum not only to defend and reinforce their political agendas but also, and especially, to defend and reinforce the legitimacy upon which they base their agendas.

In this paper I intend to focus not on Gush Emunim’s claims to Zionist authenticity but on the debate as a whole, and the way in which the movements’ proponents and detractors alike have viewed, described, imagined and categorized Gush Emunim. Each assessment of authenticity, positive or negative, is also a construction of the Zionist narrative and therefore makes far-reaching social, political and religious claims. The debate over Gush Emunim thus becomes not merely the history of a single political movement but the arena within which large segments of Israeli society engage in the process of determining their own self-identity and that of the state. The paper concludes by questioning to what extent is Gush Emunim a useful focus for research on Israeli settlement policy and social support for the settlement project.

---

<sup>4</sup> Shafir in Newman 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Don-Yehiya 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Weisbrod in Newman 1985

<sup>7</sup> Galnoor 1986

<sup>8</sup> Ravitzky 1987

## Significant difference

Before discussing individual claims to authenticity I would like to mention a few methodological issues. Most importantly, the question of authenticity is essentially a question of comparison. One historical phenomenon functions as a source of symbolic authority, to which a second historical case is compared on the basis of a determined set of criteria. If, according to the selected criteria the two cases are shown to be similar, then the latter gains the authenticity of the former. If they are shown to be dissimilar the claim to authenticity is negative. This may be a truism or rudimentary but it deserves to be mentioned explicitly for the sole sake of pointing out that the comparative act of making a claim to authenticity rests not on similarity or dissimilarity but on the selection of the criteria for comparison, or what might be called “significant difference” in the manner of Jonathan Z. Smith.<sup>9</sup> I would also add that in the face of the myriad possibilities for comparison, from organizational structure to name to personality types to political strategies to style of dress, the flag waved, language spoken, technologies employed and diet; in the face of the perhaps infinite criteria for comparison, for an authenticity claim to be effective it must not only select certain criteria as significant but must also render unseen the fact that other criteria have been excluded.

A claim to authenticity may often involve other, implicit entities: when Shimon Peres criticizes Gush Emunim as un-Zionist, for example, not only is a comparison made between the pre-state Zionist movement and Gush Emunim (whose authenticity Peres negates), but the criteria Peres selects implicitly grants himself and his political configuration a positive claim to authenticity, and therefore authority.

It also deserves mention that while significant difference and the hiding of criteria selection is necessary for the claim to authenticity, that is certainly not a recipe for complete success. In a struggle over significant difference, multiple parties, movements

---

<sup>9</sup> In “When the Chips are down” (Smith 2004, Ch. 2) Smith distinguishes between monothetic and polythetic comparisons depending on the number of criteria used for comparison. Regardless of the number of criteria, however, the *choice of criteria* is the main focus of this work. See also Ch. 11 “Differential Equations” in the same volume.

and individuals aim to present as authentic and authoritative those criteria that produce positive authenticity claims for their own political and social goals and activities, and negative authenticity claims for their competitors. The various degrees of success for their claims depend on a variety of factors.<sup>10</sup>

We have already witnessed the wide range of scholarly disagreement over Gush Emunim, including the question of authenticity. It is worth remembering that the academic community is far from an isolated ivory tower in Israeli society and its members, speaking both in their professional capacity and from personal opinion, play an important role in expressing and influencing public perceptions. While this may appear to blur the boundary between primary and secondary sources, it recognizes and addresses Israel's social, political and academic reality.<sup>11</sup> It is also primarily a question of scope: a single work might be a secondary source for a historical study of the Gush Emunim movement, but at the same time a primary source for a study of the controversy surrounding the movement and the ways it has been understood and represented. In the present paper, however, I wish to present a number of authenticity claims from spheres of the debate more widely-circulated than academic publications. Thus I have selected a few perspectives on Gush Emunim that demonstrate the variety and modes of construction of authenticity: a glimpse of Gush Emunim's projected self-image and a few reactions to that image, then a positive authenticity claim for the movement by Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer. I will then present two negative authenticity claims, one from Shimon Peres and another from Amnon Rubenstein. We will examine all of these with an eye for the criteria used to assess authenticity vis-à-vis the Zionist movement and reflect on the ways that Zionism has been imagined as a source of authority.

---

<sup>10</sup> For example, Weisbrod 1985 has put forward the idea that successful ideologies respond to redemption on national, social and individual levels, not only on one or two.

<sup>11</sup> See Feige 1995 p. 18, for example, on the relationship between researcher and researched and an interesting anecdote.

## Self-image

As mentioned earlier this paper focuses more on the debate over Gush Emunim than on the movement itself. Still, it is important to present a few of the ways in which Gush Emunim members have identified themselves with Zionism. Not only will this help to explain how the public debate began, but it will also show the variety of ways in which a claim to authenticity can be made. For example, Gush Emunim's founding charter describes its aim in the following terms:

To create a large revival movement among the people of Israel for the sake of fulfilling the Zionist vision in its full sense, by recognizing that the origin of the vision is in the heritage of Israel and the roots of Judaism, and that its aim is the full redemption of the people of Israel and the entire world.<sup>12</sup>

Without going too far in depth, it is clear that Zionism here is understood as a vision of sorts, authoritative in and of itself and worthy of a revival, but also authentically Jewish.

Authenticity can be claimed in less explicit ways. Shafir describes a "rural bias" in Gush Emunim's settlement vision through its preference for a wide spread of dispersed community settlements rather than larger towns or urban centers, and this "lopsided character" was a key factor in the reduced ability to draw Israelis to live in the West Bank. "The rural bias of this argument is well known in Zionist settlement theory," he claims, "and Gush Emunim demanded the same application."<sup>13</sup> Gush Emunim members' self-image as authentic Zionists thus had a strong impact on the way they set about to settle the West Bank, even at the cost of choosing strategies that were counter-productive.

## Zionism felt

I would now like to present a few brief reactions by contemporaries of the movement in its heyday, individuals who may have disagreed with Gush Emunim's goals or tactics but yet found it difficult to express complete opposition. In October 1974, during the period of intense settlement attempts in the Nablus area, Shlomo Shemer published an article

---

<sup>12</sup> Shafat 1995, Appendix 1, my translation.

<sup>13</sup> Shafir in Newman 1985, p, 162.

in Yediot Ahronot entitled “The heart says yes, the head says no” that describes his admiration for the settlers:

They are the foundation of the people of Israel, the fountain of idealism, of dedication, of willingness to sacrifice and self-fulfillment. He who speaks ill of them, he who casts doubt on their intentions and finds blemishes in the purity of their intention, spits into the source of the national inspiration from which every generation who yearned for this land drank.<sup>14</sup>

The author Aharon Magad expressed similar sentiments in an article published in Davar in 1980: “Don’t scorn those who with their own body fulfill the commandment to settle the Land, even if their belief is different from your own.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the act of settlement and personal devotion, other symbols such as dress, army credentials and mannerisms can associate one historical phenomenon with another, thus creating an implicit comparison. Akiva Eldar and Idit Zertal, whose judgment is decidedly critical of Gush Emunim, describes the reaction of some members of the Labor elite to Gush Emunim founder Hanan Porat: “The fighting paratrooper of blue eyes, a man of settlement who wears a kipah, was seen in their eyes as a new incarnation, and the desire of a soldier who works the land, the perfect icon of every national fighting movement.”<sup>16</sup> Thus we can see the way Gush Emunim has successfully tapped into the emotions of identity with the Zionist narrative, through diverse methods such as direct comparison in its charter and publications, and through implicit comparison invited by the use of visual symbols.

### **Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer**

In 1984 the settlement journal “Nekuda” published an interview with Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer titled “The True Messianism of Gush Emunim.”<sup>17</sup> Professor Shatz-Uffenheimer, a self-avowed former Labor Zionist and a scholar of Jewish mysticism was asked a number of questions regarding Gush Emunim, whose ten-year anniversary was

---

<sup>14</sup> Shemer 1974, my translation

<sup>15</sup> Magad 1980, my translation

<sup>16</sup> Eldar and Zertel 2004, p. 18, my translation.

<sup>17</sup> Shatz-Uffenheimer 1984

the topic of that issue of Nekuda. She describes the movement in clearly positive terms, and much of the interview (or the part published) is dedicated to comparing Gush Emunim with what the respondent sees as “the Zionist movement”. For example, the opening question was “what characterizes a false messianism and what characterizes Gush Emunim?” Her response is first to sidestep the question of any messianic belief on the part of Gush Emunim members by referring to Maimonides: that only success is proof of a messiah’s truth or falsehood. She then equates Gush Emunim and the Zionist movement:

Gush Emunim is in good company. If its root is false messianism, then those who live on the “west” side of the Green Line are false messiahs... Gush Emunim did exactly what the Zionist movement did, it didn’t renew anything: it founded settlements, developed agriculture and industry, it built a society and when necessary, it goes to war... [T]here’s no essential difference between the actions of Gush Emunim people and those done on the other side of the Green Line. The Green Line is a line of falsehood. The line of falsehood of our century.<sup>18</sup>

Thus Professor Shatz-Uffenheimer constructs a version of the Zionist narrative and of Zionist authenticity based on the programs of social and political initiative, and finds significant difference between Gush Emunim and the Labor party of her day according to the criteria of settlement building. As I mentioned above, engaging in significant difference necessarily involves excluding other criteria of comparison. In this case, granting Gush Emunim the authority of the Zionist movement means to cast a shadow on religious belief, religious observance, the messianic understanding of the state or of history on the part of members of both the earlier Zionist movement and Gush Emunim, in addition of course to the difference in political and historical context of the two phenomena, as possible criteria for determining authenticity. Zionist continuity and authenticity are determined by privileging not ideology or self-understanding, but a select group of activities: constructing buildings and communities in the biblical Land of Israel and in areas of ambiguous political status.

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 12, my translation

The interview under discussion presents us with a fascinating overlapping of claims to authenticity and symbolic authority beyond Shatz-Uffenheimer's personal perspective. Nekuda's choice of Shatz-Uffenheimer reflects their aim to show as wide a support base as possible for Gush Emunim, and the Hebrew University professor's Labor background seems to provide exactly that. Unlike Gush Emunim's religious leadership (Levinger, Waldman, Porat) or spiritual inspiration (Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook), Shatz-Uffenheimer's "insiderness" to the Israeli center-left grants a higher degree of authenticity to the claim that Gush Emunim is the continuation of the Zionist movement, and her non-religious vocabulary – speaking of settlement building, community building and "appropriate historical moments" – does Nekuda's objective well. The very presence of one who formerly identified with the Labor movement is a strong symbolic act in itself, as potent perhaps as any argument she might put forward, in surrounding Gush Emunim with the aura of Zionist authenticity based on a different criterion: party affiliation and the credentials of the movement central to the foundation and government during the early decades of the state.

### **Shimon Peres**

Shimon Peres published a piece in the Ma'ariv newspaper in October 1979, a few months after the Camp David Accord between Israel and Egypt, on the subject of Gush Emunim entitled "Faithful to what?"<sup>19</sup> In the article Peres attacks Gush Emunim on every count imaginable – from their political analysis of the Camp David agreement to their interpretation of Zionism, from the practical efficacy of settlement to their style of political activism. In so doing we are able to construct one Israeli perception of Gush Emunim and one Israeli perception of Zionism.

Peres' arguments could be divided into four categories. He criticizes Gush Emunim first of all in their understanding of Palestinian autonomy in the Camp David agreements. According to Peres, Gush Emunim claims that in six months' time, the Palestinians will be given autonomy and the basis for a Palestinian state will be laid. He disputes this

---

<sup>19</sup> Peres 1979

claim using expert political ambiguity: “Between Israel and Egypt there is an agreement on ‘autonomy’. But there is also a disagreement over its interpretation. The agreement may lead to the signing of the Camp David accord, but the disagreement threatens the agreement itself”.

Secondly, Peres attacks the usefulness of West Bank settlement in achieving either Israel’s goals or those of the Gush: settlement, he says, will not prevent a Palestinian state, will not undermine Israel’s obligations under Camp David (although he himself just undermined them), will not improve Israeli-Arab relations or weaken the PLO, will not lead to extending Israeli sovereignty and won’t oblige future governments to maintain their existence. Thirdly, he claims that Gush Emunim’s political activism is harmful to the state itself. It’s allowed to do its best to convince the public of its message, but it can’t “burst the gates and go to the voting booth at the same time.” Conflicts with the IDF, threats of violence, government ministers speaking in public against government decisions all undermine the respect for the state and its democratic character. Finally, Gush Emunim is presented as diverging from Zionist values, in the sense that they are showing Israel as the extremist element in the Arab-Israeli conflict, that they are turning Zionism into a territorialist movement rather than one of “national redemption” (הנעם גאולת). Peres also claims that settlement, while being a Zionist value, must also be accompanied by “full Zionist calculations” including a state with a strong Jewish majority, something that annexation of Judea and Samaria would threaten.

From these arguments we can piece together a vision of Zionism: the national redemption of the Jewish people through a sovereign Jewish-majority state run by the rule of law and respect for the government and its institutions, a state whose foreign policy goals include good relations with neighboring countries. In contrast, Peres’ description of Gush Emunim is the complete opposite: a movement dedicated to territory at the expense of both a Jewish majority and the integrity of a democratic state, and for whom relations with the international community is unimportant. When

compared to the previous article, we can see more clearly Peres' selection of criteria for significant difference. Rather than imagining the defining characteristic of Zionism in terms of its political and social activity, he sees the essence of Zionism as an image of the ideal state, through a particular demography and a particular mechanism of public decision-making and civil behavior. Once again we find three referents in this act of comparison: an imagined Zionism that functions as a source of legitimacy and authority, an imagined Gush Emunim whose Zionist authenticity is shown to be false (and whose project thus loses authority), and Peres' own position with both authenticity and legitimacy. This symbolic maneuver is possible not only through the selection of particular characteristics of each of the three movements, but especially and most importantly through the selection of criteria for comparison.

Only on one point did he agree with the Gush Emunim he imagined: "our historic right is to all of the Land of Israel", but he was quick to add the "historic duty" of maintaining the state's Jewish character. This is certainly not the first time that Zionism's or the State of Israel's "Jewish character" is considered as a value but left ambiguous and without a clear description. Still, it is striking that what others have seen as Gush Emunim's most characteristic or distinguishing feature – messianism and sacralization of both territory and the state – is entirely absent from Peres' description. Strangely, this aspect goes unmentioned despite the fact that the very title of the article "Faithful to what?" even suggests that the faith of Gush Emunim members or leaders is problematic.

How might we account for this omission? I propose that one explanation can be found with an eye for comparative criteria and recognition of the complexity of authoritative symbols in Israeli society. Any discussion of the religious beliefs associated with Gush Emunim and especially its spiritual inspiration, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, is bound to engage in claims not of Zionist authenticity but of Jewish authenticity. Such claims are more complex due to Judaism's rich and long history, and deserve to be the subject of another paper altogether. The inseparability of the people of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the Land of Israel, the holiness of the state as an independently-existing mystical

body, and other teachings associated with the movement have in fact been questioned and criticized on the grounds of their Jewish authenticity from within the Israeli religious camp. Yet it seems that for Shimon Peres to raise the question would open a Pandora's box of symbolic authority based not on Zionism but on Judaism: Gush Emunim claims that territorial maximalism reflects their Jewish character, and Shimon Peres might be ill-equipped to begin a religious critique without raising his own (secular) Jewish character during a period where the religious aspect of Judaism has become once again authoritative and a source of legitimacy. Rendering invisible the messianic element of Gush Emunim makes sense only when seen within the complex process of symbolic authority, in which not only does one select comparative criteria that grant authenticity to their own project and show their competitors as not authentic, but one must also consider the effect of significant difference on their own personal authority.

### **Amnon Rubenstein**

In 1980 Amnon Rubenstein published "From Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back"<sup>20</sup>, an appeal to "return to original Zionism" as the only way for Israel to "exist as the state of the Jews, with Jewish leadership and as an independent nation living in security in its land".<sup>21</sup> His mission is to steer Israeli society away from an increasing trend of irrationality epitomized by Gush Emunim that threatens both Zionism and Israel's future. For Rubenstein, the foundation of "original Zionism" and the common basis of all Zionist varieties until the Six-day War is the idea of normalization: ending the exile, creating the new Jew and the new Jewish nation, similar and equal to the gentile nations. There are three "radical conclusions" logically drawn from the idea of normalization. One, that exilic life is not a divine punishment or a mystical or spiritual predicament but a national ailment that can be cured. The second "conclusion" of normalization is a new perception of the Jewish past. Judaism and Zionism, the Jew and the Hebrew, were often seen as not only different but antithetical. He quotes Ben Gurion:

---

<sup>20</sup> Rubenstein 1980.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 168

Everything large and important for the sake of our current path we will take with us; everything small, rotten and exilic we shall cast aside together with the bad heritage (המורשת הרעה) of the dead past, in order that it shall not cast its shadow on our new soul and in order that it shall not profane the holiness of redemption (קדושת הגאולה).<sup>22</sup>

The third conclusion Rubenstein sees in normalization is the rejection of Judaism. Settling the Land of Israel distanced the new Hebrew nation from traditional Judaism and brought it closer to the family of gentile nations. “In the Land of Israel the Hebrew – not Jewish – settlement was established, that spoke Hebrew and not Yiddish. The term ‘Hebrew’ represents the superior Jew... the term “Jewish” almost disappeared from the lexicon of the new Yishuv.”<sup>23</sup>

Before moving to Rubenstein’s representation of Gush Emunim it’s worthwhile to cover one more aspect of his description of “original” Zionism. The question of Jewish distinctiveness looms large in his history of the movement, an issue that represents a fundamental dilemma for Zionist identity: that Judaism and Jewish history is at the same time both the source of identity and something to be rejected. Socialist Zionism comes forward to resolve the dilemma, incorporating the Jewish past by translating it in a new framework of socialist redemption and by claiming heir to the Jewish tradition despite, and through, a comprehensive process of translation and appropriation. Rather than “a nation like all others,” or even an exemplary nation, the new Hebrew nation and the new Zionist state has a universal socialist mission for the redemption of mankind.

In contrast to the idea of normalization and Jewish distinctiveness in fulfilling universalist values, Gush Emunim represents the contrary, a general trend since the six-day war towards essential Jewish distinctiveness and irrationality. Israel’s international isolation began to be interpreted not in terms of rational geopolitics but in light of the exilic paradigm, the product of a “mystical” and irrational hatred. Responding to Golda Meir’s dismissal of the right of European nations to criticize Israel, Rubenstein claims the

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 37. The author cites Gorani “The relation of the Poalei Zion party in the Land of Israel towards the exile” (in Hebrew), *Zionut* (2), p. 85

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

following: “Thus the post-six-day war period stands for a gradual distancing from everything that characterized State Zionism and the essential foundation of the new Jewish nationalism.”<sup>24</sup> Gush Emunim, differently from previous generations of the Religious Zionist movement, rejects normalization by interpreting international isolation as a “satanic desire to uproot Torah”.<sup>25</sup> The UN Security Council is likened to Ishmael and Esau, and the State of Israel is identified with the Israelites at the Red Sea. In relation to the Arabs, a new tendency towards holy war and genocide is visible; the opposite of Herzl’s liberal vision of the community of nations, and peace itself is similarly subjected to a reinterpretation: “real” peace is the messiah and not a political configuration.

We are thus presented with yet another vision of authentic Zionism whose defining characteristic is its historical, rational and geopolitical understanding of the Jewish nation and the State of Israel, its rejection of traditional Judaism and its commitment to fulfilling universal values. Gush Emunim in contrast is irrational – expressed in its interpretation of Israel’s political standing in terms of biblical models and the exilic paradigm, and in its vision of the Jewish nation according to an essential and mystical difference. Rubenstein is not alone in describing such a split in worldviews in Israeli society<sup>26</sup> and the political and social effects of this split are anything but superficial. However, the author is doing more than tracing political activism to ideology; he is contesting the Gush’s claim to authenticity and putting forward a counter-claim by elevating a certain type of comparison as significant and authoritative. In contrast to the claims discussed earlier, Rubenstein’s are based on choosing “rationality”, the relationship between Judaism and modernity and the desired relationship between Jews and Gentiles as the definitive criteria for judging authenticity.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> p. 122. Rubenstein makes extensive use of the philosophy of Harold Fisch in this regard.

<sup>26</sup> See Ravitzky 1987, or Lustick ch. 4, for example.

## Conclusions

So far we have just seen how Gush Emunim has been imagined or presented in quite different ways. From an organic continuation of the pioneers expressed through personal ethic, dress, military service and agriculture, to anti-democratic territorialists, from messianic Zealots to community builders, not only do these Gush Emunims have little in common but also the various Zionisms to which they are compared. This is more than painting a caricature by highlighting only certain aspects of Gush Emunim or Zionism, it is also making a statement on national identity. To see Rubenstein's symbolic strategy, or the strategy of Peres, or Shatz-Uffenheimer, Nekuda, or of members of Gush Emunim itself, as simply pointing to continuity or lack thereof is to lose sight of the construction of Zionism as the symbolic referent of authority by choosing only one comparative criterion as significant. Establishing authenticity, ultimately, is remaking the past in your own image by selecting which difference makes a difference.

At the same time a wider perspective on the debate over Gush Emunim reveals not only conflict and division but also similarity and integration. The Zionist movement, its personalities, symbols, strategies, concepts and visions all form a common reservoir of authority that is recognized by a large majority of Israelis, even as they interpret, configure and deploy them in different ways. We might say that a community or a tradition is not a group of individuals who share a common goal, policy, vision or lifestyle, but who perceive their diverse and competing goals in the same terminology and engage in the construction of authority using the same symbols.

Gadi Taub's recent publication, "The Settlers"<sup>27</sup> is a case in point in which the author chooses as comparative criteria the role of settlement and the movements' primary objective. The result of such a comparison is that while the original "State Zionism" used settlement as a means to pursue the end of sovereignty, the "Redemption Zionism" of religious settlers uses the sovereign state to pursue the aim of settlement. Here we can see that the debate over settlement is alive and well, bound up with the

---

<sup>27</sup> Taub 2007

question of authenticity and the close link between Israeli identity and policy. Taub's analysis does well to demonstrate the historical and ideological intricacies of one group's claim to Zionist authenticity and the resulting cultural and political effects. At the same time, to differentiate between "the settlers" and original Zionism without recognizing that certain criteria have been consciously chosen risks, as always, avoiding the fact that an original, authentic Zionism is being simultaneously forged from the comparison itself. He writes,

[I]dentifying Redemption Zionism with State Zionism... hides... the very fact that it created two camps and tore the foundations of consensus in Israel... It hides from view the essential: the dramatic transformations that occurred in the spirit of the Religious Zionist movement, precisely because it exerted so much effort to identify the settlement enterprise with State Zionism. The meaning of the Religious Zionists' story is made clear, it seems to me, only when we recognize... the contradiction between the messianic project of the settlers and the whole Zionist project.<sup>28</sup>

Taub's work does well to shed light on the ways Religious Zionist settlers identified themselves with "State Zionism" or, using this paper's terminology, the acts of comparison on the part of the settlers to feel and project authenticity for their policies and projects. At the same time, however, the author's own act of comparison and choice of significant difference, and the process of constructing an authentic "State Zionism" is decidedly opaque.

Leaving unilluminated the process of selecting comparative criteria also risks adding an ontological dimension to the split between the two groups being compared. Claiming Zionist authenticity is an important and authoritative process for many and most groups in Israeli society; the race to appropriate Zionist symbols for **any** policy or ideology shows that **all** who participate in the race share a common set of authoritative symbols by which they – fascinatingly – feel drawn to diverse policies and through which they justify those policies. How we identify different sectors of society and whether we see

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp 22-23, my translation.

divisions or commonalities between them may in fact be the result of our own choice of comparative criteria and significant difference.

Returning to the particular and the practical, if Gush Emunim has been presented in such diverse ways, both in scholarship and elsewhere, perhaps the very question of what Gush Emunim deserves to be revisited. Is Gush Emunim synonymous with Religious Zionism? Is Religious Zionism synonymous with the teachings of Zvi Yehuda Kook? What is the relation between Gush Emunim and the individual settlers? Between Gush Emunim and Amanah, the government-recognized settlement organization, or Moetzet Yesha, the Council of Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, or the settlements themselves? Weisburd's research on settler motivations show that only a minority of settlers identified with the teaching of Zvi Yehuda Kook<sup>29</sup>. Sprinzak's "tip of the iceberg" theory of religious radicalism spreads the focus of research from movement leaders to a larger sector of society,<sup>30</sup> as does reflecting on the deployment of religious school funds and pupils in Gush Emunim-organized demonstrations. Others have commented on internal differences within the movement<sup>31</sup> and we should not lose sight of the fact that the movement kept no membership list. Finally, the overlapping or shared interests between those of Gush Emunim leaders and Likud (and other) politicians undermines the perception of Gush Emunim as a unified and coherent social force, an autonomous entity with its own agency and asserting itself upon Israeli society. More detailed research on Gush Emunim and its leaders, their connections with other individuals and other sectors of Israeli society would be well-received by a social historian, although it might make it more difficult to confer (or deny) Zionist authenticity upon the Gush and retell the Zionist narrative in our own images.

---

<sup>29</sup> Weisburd 1989 and Weisburd and Warring in Newman 1985. Despite this and their claim that "the centre of Gush Emunim activities has shifted from the movement itself to the settlements that emerged from it" (183), Weisburd and Warring continue to speak of "Gush Emunim settlements" and "Gush Emunim settlers".

<sup>30</sup> Sprinzak 1981, 1991

<sup>31</sup> Lustick 1988 Ch. 5, for example. Don-Yehiya's conclusion was that once the settlement project began concretely there was no further consensus with Gush Emunim.

## Works Cited

- Avineri, S. (1986). "Ideology and Israel's Foreign Policy." The Jerusalem Quarterly **37**: 3-13.
- Avruch, K. (1978). "Gush Emunim: Politics, Religion, and Ideology in Israel." Middle East Review **11**(2): 26-31.
- Don-Yehiya, E. (1987). "Jewish Messianism, Religious Zionism and Israeli Politics: The Impact and Origins of Gush Emunim." Middle Eastern Studies **23**(2).
- Eldar, A. and I. Zartal (2004). The Lords of the Land: The Settlers and the State of Israel 1967-2004. Israel, Kinneret.
- Feige, M. (1995). One space, two places: Gush Emunim, Peace Now and the construction of Israeli space (in Hebrew). Jerusalem, Hamul.
- Galnoor, I. (1986). "The Failure of Religious Zionism." Jerusalem Quarterly **40**: 65-72.
- Gush Emunim (1978) Master Plan for the Settlement of Judea and Samaria (in Hebrew).
- Lustick, I. (1988). For the land and the Lord: Jewish fundamentalism in Israel. New York, N.Y., Council on Foreign Relations.
- Magad, A. (1980). "The Phenomenon: Gush Emunim" (in Hebrew). Davar 12.12.1980.
- Newman, D. Ed. (1985). The Impact of Gush Emunim: politics and settlement in the West Bank. New York, St. Martin's Press.
- Peres, S. (1979). "Faithful to what?" (in Hebrew) Ma'ariv 14.12.1979.
- Ravitski, A. (1987). "Redemption and Covenant: Religious Zionism of Another Kind." Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel(60): 28-34.
- Rubenstein, A. (1980). From Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv, Schocken Publishing House.
- Shafat, G. (1995). Gush Emunim: Ha-sipur me-achorei ha-kla'im, Sifriyat Beit-El.
- Shatz-Uffenheimer, R. (1984). "The True Messianism of Gush Emunim (in Hebrew)." Nekuda(69): 12-13.
- Shemer, S. (1974). "The heart says yes, the head says no" (in Hebrew). Yediot Ahronot 10.10.1974.
- Smith, J. Z. (2004). Relating religion: essays in the study of religion. Chicago, University of Chicago.
- Taub, G. (2007). The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism. Israel, Yedioth Ahronoth.
- Weisburd, D. (1989). Jewish settler violence: deviance as a social reaction. USA, The Pennsylvania State University.